

# Equal employment program manager takes proactive approach to discrimination

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Alberto Crespo, Equal Employment Program Manager for Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield, pays attention to the 'rumbling in the weeds' and takes a proactive approach to problems that may arise from issues of race, national origin, age, disability, gender and religion.

Along with his small staff, he takes on the daunting task of servicing a civilian workforce of 4600 at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield, which includes tenant units such as Medical Activity, Dental Activity, National Guard, and ROTC personnel. Fortunately, the office is content they do not have issues stemming from all of them.

By the official book, the Equal Employment Opportunity office is responsible for developing, implementing, and administering all EEO civilian functions.

They are also responsible for complaint investigations, affirmation employment programs, program evaluations and acting as principal advisor to and for all activities and the installation commander.

They advise staff and line officials of equal opportunity matters affecting the civilian workforce, job applicants, and the surrounding communities.

"Complaints begin and are initially handled at the lowest level," said Crespo. "There are always stages to complaints with the first being the pre-complaint. Then at the formal stage, though still being at the installation level, an investigation begins with an outside investigator. From this point, it goes into court."

Once the investigation is complete, the complainant referred to now as the aggrieved, gets to make the decision as to whether to continue with an EEO judge and request a hearing or ask Army to make a decision. Because they feel that a judge will listen and have a heart for their plight, most persons opt for a judge.

But throughout the whole EEO complaint process there are always two choices---proceed with complaint or withdraw.

"EEO is not a fast lane," said Crespo. "It is slow so that outcomes can be as accurate as possible. At times a person may come in with a lot of pressure and emotions, and in the long run discover that the issue is not ours. If a person comes in with a letter of reprimand or removal because of job related issues, it is not discrimination." Crespo noted that the only bad thing about EEO is that it is a wide lane and for any reason, persons may submit concerns to him. "That is when they may have to be referred elsewhere for resolution," Crespo said. Some may fall within the purview of civilian personnel, legal, or even management. But the ultimate objective is for resolution at the lowest level.

But if a person feels that they have a discrimination problem that fits into one of the categories, they can contact the EEO office for an appointment and staff will decide

in which applicable category it relates. The EEO office is bound by confidentiality.

Anonymity may be requested, which is granted up to a certain point.

But once the complaint goes into the formal stage, anonymity no longer exists because in order to make a decision, resolution, or funding to pay for the complaint, higher headquarters need to know who is filing the charge along with what it is all about.

Okay. You have made your complaint. So how are you expected to go back and work in your environment?

According to Crespo there are three sides to every story: the individual's, management's, and the truth.

"We will try to get to the truth as much as possible. There is no easy solution. We have had complainants come in crying, hollering, banging on tables...and we let them vent their frustration until they become calm. We have been here at times until 8 p.m. to help them gain their composure or as late as 4 a.m. when working on an investigation," said Crespo. "However long we need to be here for them, some type of closure is sought. All we ask is that a person comes in with an open mind and realize it is not a quick fix, but it can be done."

Contrary to the stereotype, EEO does not cater to the manager or the employee. "We just let the process take its course," said Crespo. "We do have managers that come through our doors also seeking assistance."

Contractors can receive EEO assistance if they are discriminated against by a government employee or supervised by one.

The Special Emphasis Program is under the umbrella of EEO. The Federal Women's Program, Black Employment Program, Hispanic Employment Program, Individuals with Disabilities Program, and the Asian-American Program are open for membership.

New members are always welcome and are open to anyone of any culture. Individuals who wish to join are volunteers and serve on collateral duty. All of these programs are



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**Alberto Crespo, Fort Stewart - Hunter Army Airfield Equal Employment Program Manager, discusses the complaint process with an aggrieved.**

Department of the Army mandated. Meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month in Building 624.

As with many other directorates, the EEO office has an active outreach program. Right now they are in partnership with Georgia Southern University in bringing Hispanic children to the installations to show them jobs they can do as civilians to support Soldiers and their missions. EEO office also helps the Hinesville Ministerial Alliance when requested.

Before his life became involved in EEO, Crespo spent over 20 years in the military as an infantryman stationed such places as Fort Benning, Fort Jackson, Fort Hood, Germany, and Fort Stewart.

Since March 2003, Crespo has been working in the field of equal employment, but he literally runs away from work when he can. Living in Pooler, a long way from his native home of Ricon, Puerto Rico, he finds time to run eight miles or less and work out in the gym.

Deborah, his wife, is affectionately referred to as Crespo's strongest supporter, his rock, his backbone. Two sons have followed in his footsteps with military careers that have them stationed currently in Japan and Louisiana.

Crespo is dedicated to eliminating barriers that may exist in the workplace at Stewart and Hunter.

"There is power in numbers, and a positive, pro-active workforce can make things happen," said Crespo.